Child labor in India

The problem of child labor is a significant challenge, especially for developing countries. But children belong in school, not in a workplace. Child labor deprived children of their right to go to school and reinforces the intergenerational cycle of poverty. India ranks 2nd place in the list of countries with the most child laborers in the world (children aged 5 to 14). The main reasons for this are poverty, illiteracy and population growth.

Under Indian law, children under 14 are allowed to work as long as the work is not considered "hazardous". Many non-hazardous family enterprises fall under this regulation, meaning child labor in such places is legal and unpunished. According to the Indian government, about 17 million underage children work there. The United Nations and child welfare organizations estimate that the number is more than 60 million, as many children are "hidden workers" working legally on those family farms.

Children are often forced to work, for example in weaving mills, car repair shops and other workshops. Younger children (between 5 and 10 years old) collect fees in car parks, sort recyclables, harvest crops, pack boxes, and sell vegetables on the roadside and newspapers. Many earn only a few cents a day. For somewhat older children (between 11 and 14), working in households, dhabas (roadside restaurants), hotels, factories and construction sites are common. The earnings here can amount to up to 5 dollars a day.

The worst form of child labor is "bonded labor", which refers to children whose parents sell them for money or to pay debts or loans with the cash they get. This form of child labor is widespread in rural India, making the worker-slave relationship an integral part of the social fabric.

Combating child labor is a sensitive issue for the Indian government, and it wants to modernize the Indian economy and the country's image. Over the past years, the government has therefore banned many jobs for children, raided sweatshops and sent children caught working back to school. However, child protection activists believe there are still too many loopholes in the current regulations and social obstacles that hinder efforts to curb child labor.

When children are forced to work, they do so at the expense of their education, resulting in them being permanently trapped in the cycle of poverty. Good education is, therefore, an effective means of combating child labor. A step in the right direction has been taken by introducing free and compulsory education from 6 to 14 years. Employers must also provide education and nutrition facilities to teach future adults basic education and healthy lifestyles. This way, at least the next generation can have significantly more qualified and educated parents.